

# **Reasons, Capacities and the Motivational Requirement**

Rosemary Lowry

Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.,  
Discipline of Philosophy,  
University of Adelaide, August 2008

## **Table of contents:**

<b>Abstract</b>	iv
<b>Statement of originality</b>	v
<b>Introduction</b>	
§1. The background	1
§2. The aims	2
§3. The chapters	3
<b>Chapter One: What makes something a reason?</b>	
§4. Explanatory and normative reasons	6
§5. Subjective and objective normative reasons	6
§6. Content and constraints	7
§7. Under which conditions does a consideration count as a reason?	8
§8. Desire theories of reasons	9
§9. Value theories of reasons	15
§10. Value theories, desire theories and initial plausibility	18
<b>Chapter Two: Do we have reasons to enhance our wellbeing?</b>	
§11. An introduction to reasons <sub>wellbeing</sub>	27
§12. Wellbeing	28
§13. Experiential theories	29
§14. Objective goods theories	30
§15. Desire-satisfaction theories	35
§16. Value theories of reasons and wellbeing	40
§17. Desire theories of reasons and wellbeing	42
§18. Explanation of divergence from intuitions	44
<b>Chapter Three: Why we should reject desire theories of reasons</b>	
§19. The past and present chapters	46
§20. The arbitrariness objection	47
§21. Desires that ought to be eradicated	52
§22. A Nagel and anti-Nagel theory of motivation	55
<b>Chapter Four: The motivational requirement</b>	
§23. The motivational requirement and the scope for interpretation	63
§24. Why we might reject the motivational requirement	64
§25. Clarifying the motivational requirement	69
§26. Interpretations of the motivational requirement	76
<b>Chapter Five: MM and its virtues</b>	
§27. MM and WM	87
§28. Connection between responsibility and reasons	87
§29. Birds, babies and comatose patients	92
§30. Circumstance descriptors and reasons	94
§31. Reasons which serve no purpose	96
§32. Degrees of moral responsibility	98

§33. An objection to MM	99
<b>Chapter Six: Is a value theory that employs MM a desire theory?</b>	
§34. Desire theories, MM-value theories and actions without value	102
§35. Desire theories, MM-value theories and actions with value	103
§36. Desire theories, MM-value theories and motivational conditions on reasons	104
§37. Is an MM-value theory a desire theory of reasons?	110
§38. Will objections against desire theories apply to an MM-value theory?	111
<b>Conclusion</b>	
§39. Summary, contrasts, and wellbeing revisited	114
<b>Bibliography</b>	121

## Abstract

This thesis analyses theories of practical reason. In particular I compare *desire theories of reasons* with *value theories of reasons*. Desire theories of reasons, as I define them, claim that it is a necessary condition of A having a reason to  $\phi$  that A's reason depend on A's antecedent desires. In contrast, I define value theories of reasons as those theories that claim that it is a necessary condition of A having a reason to  $\phi$  that A's  $\phi$ -ing be valuable. In this thesis my main concern lies with those value theorists who accept the *motivational requirement*: the claim that if an agent is to have a reason to  $\phi$ , then it must be possible for the agent to  $\phi$  on the basis of this reason. In particular, I concentrate on those value theorists who claim that A has a reason to  $\phi$  iff a) A's  $\phi$ -ing is valuable; b) it is possible for A to  $\phi$  on the basis of this reason.

I reject desire theories of reasons on the basis of several criticisms. I claim that our desires are normatively arbitrary, and that according to desire theories of reasons, some of our desires ought to be eradicated. I argue instead for a value theory of reasons that adopts a particular interpretation of the motivational requirement. I distinguish three different interpretations of the motivational requirement, each offering a connection between reasons and motivations that differs in strength. The first, strongest requirement claims that in order for A to have a normative reason to  $\phi$ , it must be possible for A to  $\phi$  on the basis of this reason *given certain qualities that A possesses* (where I take the sense of 'possible' relevant to these interpretations to be one that reflects an agent's capacities). The second and weakest requirement claims that in order for A to have a normative reason to  $\phi$ , it must be possible for A to  $\phi$  on the basis of this reason *if A possessed certain qualities*. The last and moderate requirement claims that in order for A to have a normative reason to  $\phi$ , it must be possible for A to  $\phi$  on the basis of this reason *if A possessed certain qualities and A either has these qualities, or it is possible for her to get herself into a state where she has them*. I argue for a value theory of reasons that employs this last, moderate motivational requirement.

I argue that a value theory that adopts the moderate motivational requirement is best, as it allows the theory to be practically useful; reasons on this account have a role in deterrence, encouragement and praise- and blame-worthiness. The theory also aligns with a plausible account of eligible candidates for reasons. While the employment of the moderate motivational requirement in a value theory of reasons likens the theory, in some respects, to a desire theory, it avoids the objections raised against desire theories of reasons. In this way, a value theory of reasons that employs the moderate motivational requirement combines the attractive features of a desire theory and a value theory. Specifically, it generates reasons that are both dependent on an individual's qualities, and also aligned with an account of value.

## **Statement of Originality**

To the best of my knowledge all of the material presented in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my own original work, and has not been presented previously for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University. If accepted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, I consent that this thesis be made available for loan and photocopying.

*Rosemary Lowry*      *13<sup>th</sup> August 2008*